

*Washington, DC* -- In advance of President Obama's meeting with Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) has sent a letter to President Obama requesting the declassification of U.S. intelligence documents, held by the Pentagon, Federal Bureau of Investigation and Central Intelligence Agency, related to human rights abuses, and specifically the disappearance of children, that occurred during the military regime, which ruled Argentina between 1976 and 1983. The release of documents would help reveal the true identity of hundreds of Argentine children who were born in captivity and taken away from their biological mothers.

"Thousands of families have waited more than 30 years to learn the fates of their loved ones, and we have an opportunity to make a contribution to truth and justice by helping to bring this troubling chapter in Argentina's history to a close," Hinchey wrote. "I ask that you follow through on your administration's commitment to openness by reviewing these files for declassification. The release of these documents would once again demonstrate our nation's dedication to human rights and open government and help lift the veil of secrecy that still hangs over this horrific part of Argentina's history."

President Obama's Executive Order 13526 established a procedure for the type of declassification Hinchey has requested. The Obama administration has also committed to an unprecedented level of openness through the establishment of the National Declassification Center and the U.S.'s prominent role in the Open Government Partnership (OGP).

In May, the Republican majority of the U.S. House of Representatives rejected a Hinchey-authored amendment, which would have directed the U.S. Director of National Intelligence to issue a report to Congress on Argentine human rights violations during this period. Previous versions of the amendment passed with strong bipartisan support in the House, but were ultimately not made law due to objections levied against the underlying legislation. Hinchey's measure was supported by the Argentine government, the National Security Archive of George Washington University and various human rights organizations.

During the 1970s and 1980s, over 30,000 people "disappeared" at the hands of the military junta in Argentina, including hundreds of women who were abducted by Argentine security forces and had children who were born into captivity. Those children were then given to members of the Argentine security forces while the mothers are believed to have been killed. The identities of nearly 100 of those children have been discovered, but the whereabouts of the majority of them remains unknown. Hinchey's amendment would have shed light on the

unknown fate of these children, who would be in their 20s and early 30s today.

In 1976, amidst social unrest and a deep political crisis in Argentina, a military coup installed an extraordinarily cruel dictatorship. Illegal detentions, torture and summary executions of dissidents became routine. Cross country operations to capture and assassinate dissidents were organized by Argentina in cooperation with Southern Cone military regimes in what was known as Operation Condor. Over the years, as the victims of the repression increasingly went missing, a new tactic of the Argentine security forces was revealed. It is estimated that nearly 30,000 people disappeared in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. Many of these victims, known as "the disappeared" or "los desaparecidos," were abducted, tortured, and then dropped far out into the ocean.

This is not the first time Hinchey has sought to make public the role and knowledge of U.S. intelligence agencies pertaining to human rights abuses in Latin America. In 1999, Hinchey succeeded in passing legislation that required the CIA to report to Congress on its involvement in the 1973 coup of Chile's democratically elected President, Salvador Allende. Following the coup, President Allende was assassinated and General Augusto Pinochet began his 17-year dictatorship. The report, now known as the Hinchey Report, makes a clear case that the United States - at the very highest levels of government - was deeply involved in the destabilization of Chile's government and economy over a period of nearly 20 years. The Hinchey Report revealed that, beginning in the early 1960s and continuing through the late 1970s, the U.S. funneled millions of dollars to opposition groups to prevent the rise to power of the Chilean Left. The CIA admitted its participation in an unsuccessful 1970 plot to prevent President Allende from taking office and its knowledge of the 1973 coup that led to Allende's death and the rise of Pinochet.

The full text of  [Hinchey's letter](#) to President Obama follows:

November 2, 2011

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

Please accept my gratitude for your continuing efforts in promoting human rights and government transparency. Since the beginning of your administration, there have been several productive steps to honor your promise of operating at an unprecedented level of openness, including the establishment of the National Declassification Center and the U.S.'s prominent role in the Open Government Partnership (OGP). As a member of the House Appropriations Committee on Defense, I believe we cannot overlook the role our older national security archives can play in promoting truth and justice for the victims of human rights abuses. In light of your upcoming meeting with President Cristina Kirchner of Argentina, you now have the opportunity to prove our dedication to human rights and build upon your transparency efforts while strengthening the diplomatic relationship with the government of Argentina.

Many Latin American nations are still struggling to come to terms with the legacy of human rights abuses perpetrated by military regimes in the 1970's and 80's. I have sought to shed light on these abuses for many years. A CIA-issued report, required by an amendment I offered to the Fiscal Year 2000 Intelligence Authorization Act, helped uncover U.S. knowledge of events in Chile under the brutal regime of Augusto Pinochet. Given the U.S. intelligence community's relationship with its Latin American counterparts, there is also relevant information in our classified national security archives concerning cases in Argentina. Even a limited, measured release can make a significant contribution to bring closure to the families and children of the disappeared.

To further demonstrate our nation's commitment to human rights, I urge the review and release of U.S. intelligence documents held by the Pentagon, Federal Bureau of Investigation and Central Intelligence Agency related to Argentina's security forces and detention centers, beginning in 1976, responsible for human rights abuses, specifically concerning the children of the disappeared. This information can provide reconciliation and closure for millions of Argentines who are still struggling with the legacy of oppression by the military regime.

From 1976 to the mid-1980's, hundreds of children were born into captivity and distributed to members of the Argentine security forces. While their mothers are believed to have been killed, the identities of some of these children, who would be in their 20's and early 30's today, have been discovered. Yet tragically the identities and whereabouts of the majority of those born in captivity remain unknown.

A discretionary release of State Department records on Argentina was authorized by President Clinton and implemented by President Bush. While this release has been able to provide some insight, it lacks the detailed documents from U.S. intelligence and national security agencies that could shed light on the unidentified children. The State Department has set a precedent with its release, and intelligence agencies are more than capable of selectively reviewing relevant records, as demonstrated by the CIA's report on Chile.

These documents are well over 25 years old, making them eligible for declassification review pursuant to Executive Order 13526. Your Executive Order established an unambiguous path for declassification, and I believe these documents are strong candidates for mandatory declassification by executive authority. The substantial backlog at the National Archives and Records Administration and history of unwillingness to declassify by U.S. intelligence agencies has led me to believe that systematic declassification is not a suitable solution.

Thousands of families have waited more than 30 years to learn the fates of their loved ones, and we have an opportunity to make a contribution to truth and justice by helping to bring this troubling chapter in Argentina's history to a close. I ask that you follow through on your administration's commitment to openness by reviewing these files for declassification. The release of these documents would once again demonstrate our nation's dedication to human rights and open government and help lift the veil of secrecy that still hangs over this horrific part of Argentina's history.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey